



Speech by

Neil Roberts

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

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TOBACCO AND OTHER SMOKING PRODUCTS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (4.31 p.m.): The Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill continues the Beattie government's groundbreaking and responsible move to limit the devastating effects smoking has on the health of so many Australians. A Queensland Health information centre circular of February 1997 notes that, of the 99,409 registered deaths in Queensland between 1989 and 1993, 15,271 or 15 per cent were estimated to be directly attributable to cigarette smoking. We should reflect on those figures with grave concern.

More than 3,000 Queenslanders a year die as a direct result of a smoking related illness. Additionally, an estimated eight per cent of all deaths in the zero- to four-year-old age group were directly attributable to cigarette smoking by mothers during pregnancy. According to the Queensland Public Health Forum, smoking related illnesses cost the Queensland health system \$108 million a year. Smoking is without question the most insidious and preventable health hazard in Australia. It costs lives by the thousands; it costs money by the millions. It is time we took the tough and responsible decisions required to minimise the impact this scourge inflicts on our community.

The reforms we are putting in place are long overdue and welcomed by most people. Queensland now leads the nation in terms of smoking related reforms, and I commend the minister for taking the lead on this important issue. Like the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998, this bill continues the government's measured and considered approach of limiting the effects of smoking through consultation with community stakeholders, including the general public and the business community.

The vast majority of clubs and pubs in Queensland embrace the new legislation because they were involved in each step of the drafting process. This inclusive process has been welcomed widely and in fact is now being copied by other states. There are some in the hotel and club industry who fear a loss of trade as a result of these reforms. I am of the view that, whereas there may be some impact on patronage in some areas in the short term only, the new laws will provide clubs and hotels with new opportunities to market to a whole new category and growing number of people in the community who prefer a smoke-free environment for their entertainment. Many of these people currently avoid or do not go to clubs and pubs simply because they cannot stand the smoke.

Another significant benefit arising out of the bill is that it will lead to a safer and healthier workplace for the thousands of hospitality employees who tend tables, serve drinks and entertain in our clubs, pubs and restaurants. They will be saved from the well-documented, adverse effects of passive smoking, and the benefits of this cannot be underestimated. This bill also reinforces the government's desire to restrict children's access to cigarettes and other smoking products. The best way to reduce the number of smoking related illnesses is to reduce the number of people taking up smoking in the first instance.

I am disturbed by my own observations of what appears to be a significant number of young women who take up smoking. The awful statistics about infant death related to smoking should, in itself, be a sufficient enough deterrent. However, despite concerted efforts by governments and community agencies to discourage smoking, the take-up rate amongst young people is still too high. Smoking is not cool. Smoking does not keep you slim. Smoking does not make you an automatic member of the in crowd.

Smoking does not make you look more mature. Government and the community generally need to ramp up their efforts to counter the pervasive and insidious misinformation and inappropriate lifestyle images which are often associated with smoking, particularly through the medium of film and television.

I am loathe to include in my speech any criticism of our beloved ABC comedy show *Kath and Kim*, which is currently screening on Thursday nights. Kath is obviously addicted to nicotine, but as much as I love the show I cringe each time I see her light up a cigarette—usually in a moment of stress such as waiting for Telstra or seeking some refuge from Kel's irresistible advances. Whereas writers and directors may argue that such features are essential to the portrayal of their character, I am concerned that such inclusions send inappropriate and reinforcing messages to young people that smoking is okay and that significant and influential people think it is acceptable and normal behaviour, which it is not. I believe we should be looking for every opportunity to reinforce the message that smoking is bad—bad for individuals, bad for the community and bad for the nation. Our film and television industry has a responsibility to share in the task of spreading this message at every opportunity.

In closing, I thank and congratulate the minister again on the initiatives outlined in this bill. It provides an opportunity for this parliament to significantly improve the lives and health of many thousands of Queenslanders, and it deserves the support of every member of the House.